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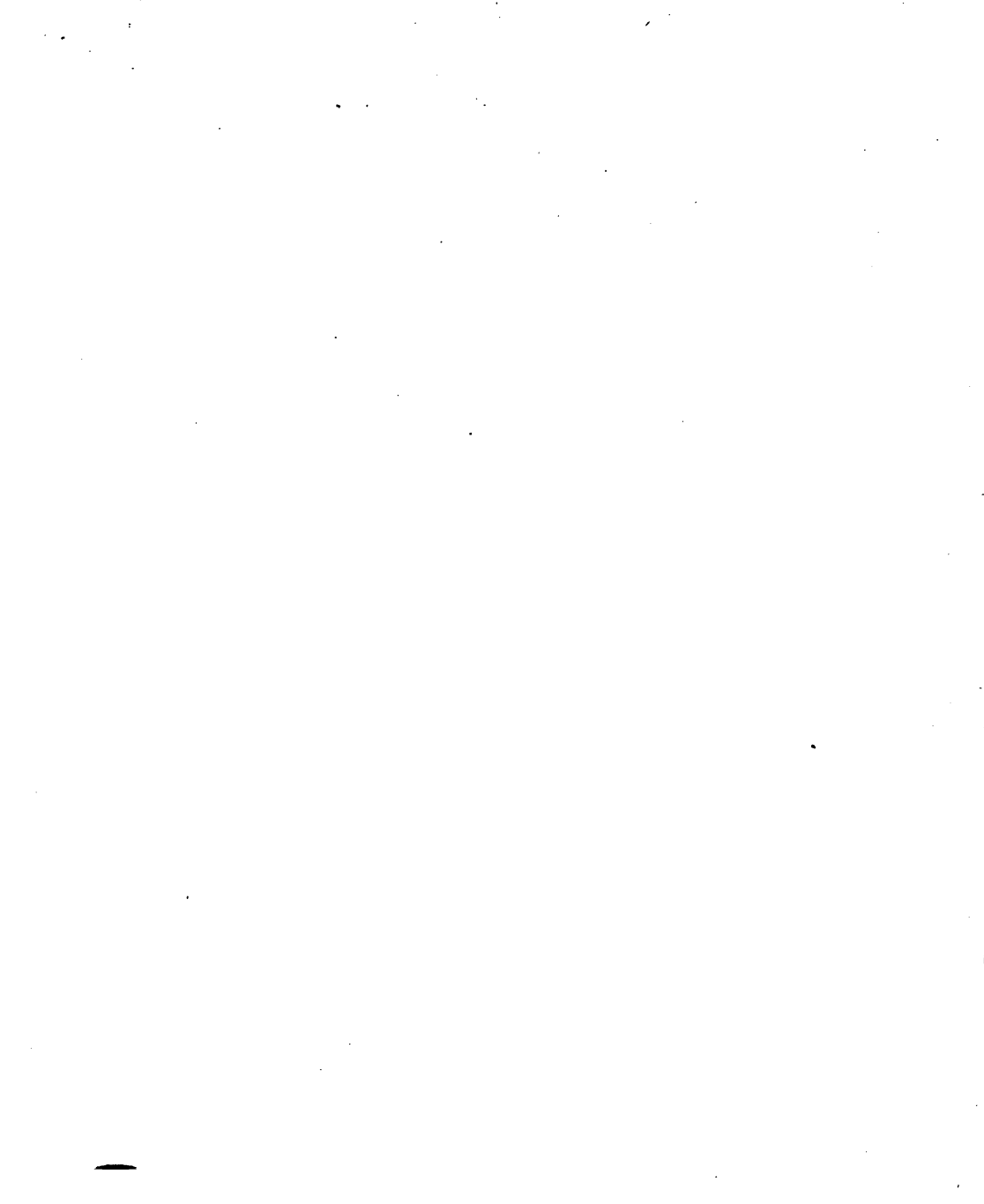
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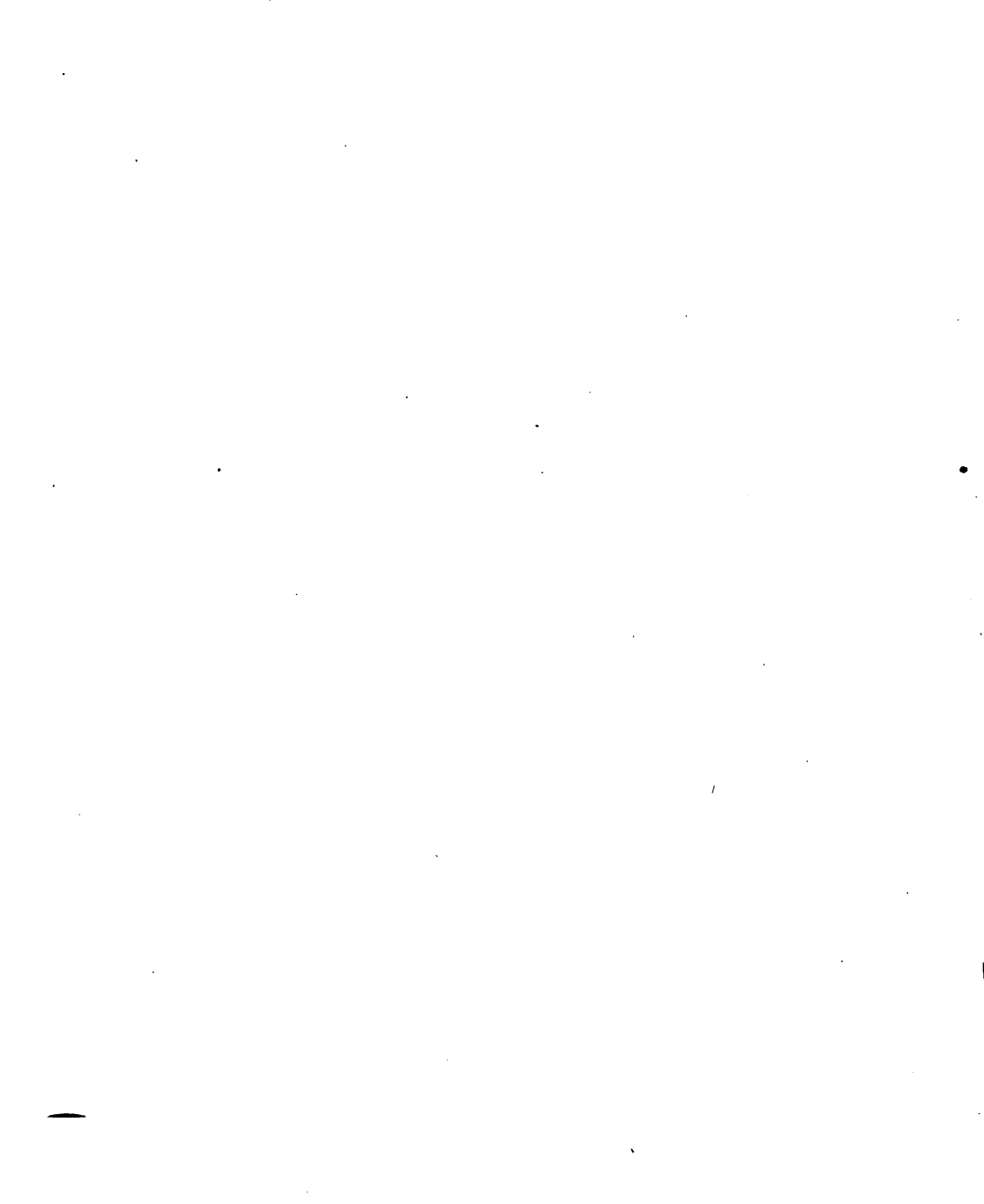
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# BRUSHWOOD.

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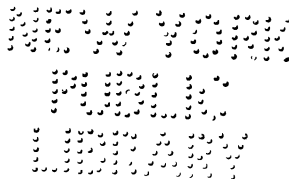
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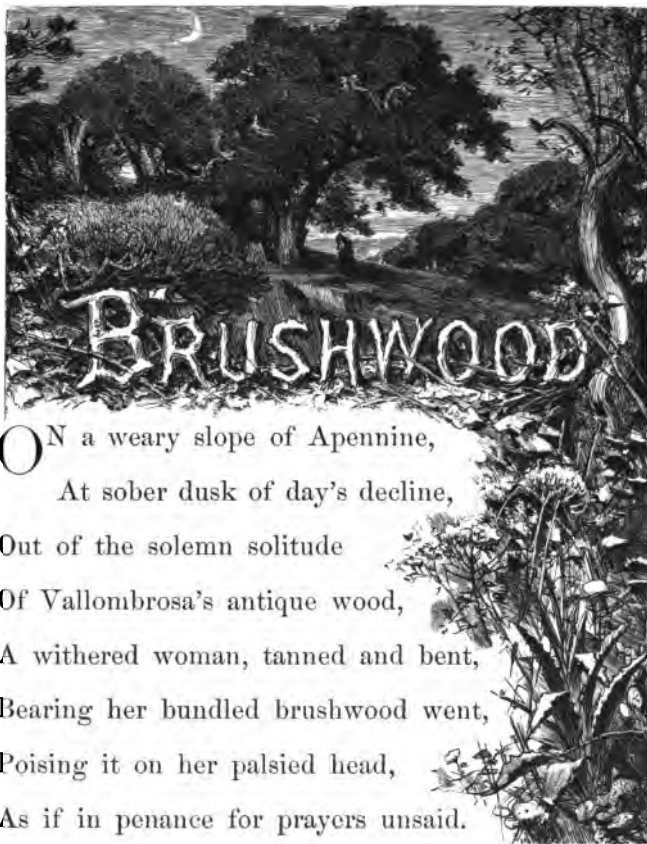
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BRUSHWOOD.





ON a weary slope of Apennine,  
At sober dusk of day's decline,  
Out of the solemn solitude  
Of Vallombrosa's antique wood,  
A withered woman, tanned and bent,  
Bearing her bundled brushwood went,  
Poising it on her palsied head,  
As if in penance for prayers unsaid.

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**H**ER dull cheeks channelled were with tears,  
Shed in the storms of eighty years;  
Her wild hair fell in gusty flow,  
White as the foamy brook below :  
Still toiled she with her load alone,  
With feeble feet but steadfast will,  
To gain her little home, that shone  
Like a dreary lantern on the hill.





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THE mountain child, no toil could tame,

With lighter load beside her came,

Spake kindly, but its

accents fond

Were lost,—soon lost on

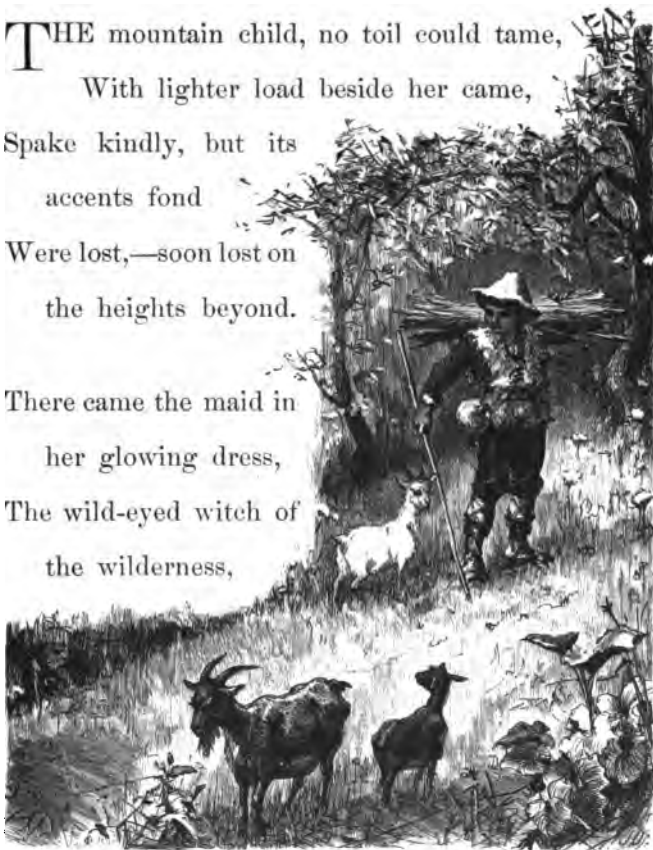
the heights beyond.

There came the maid in

her glowing dress,

The wild-eyed witch of

the wilderness,



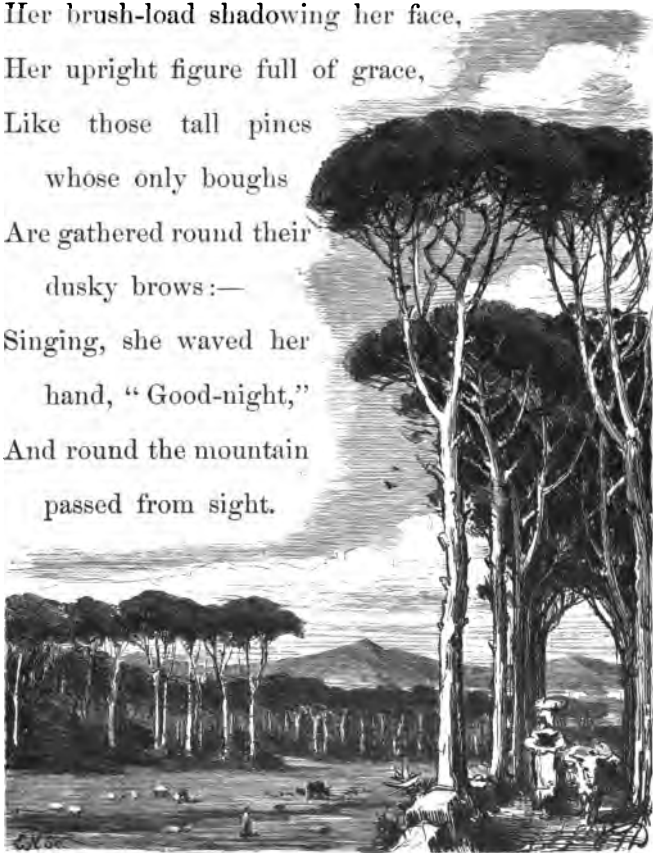


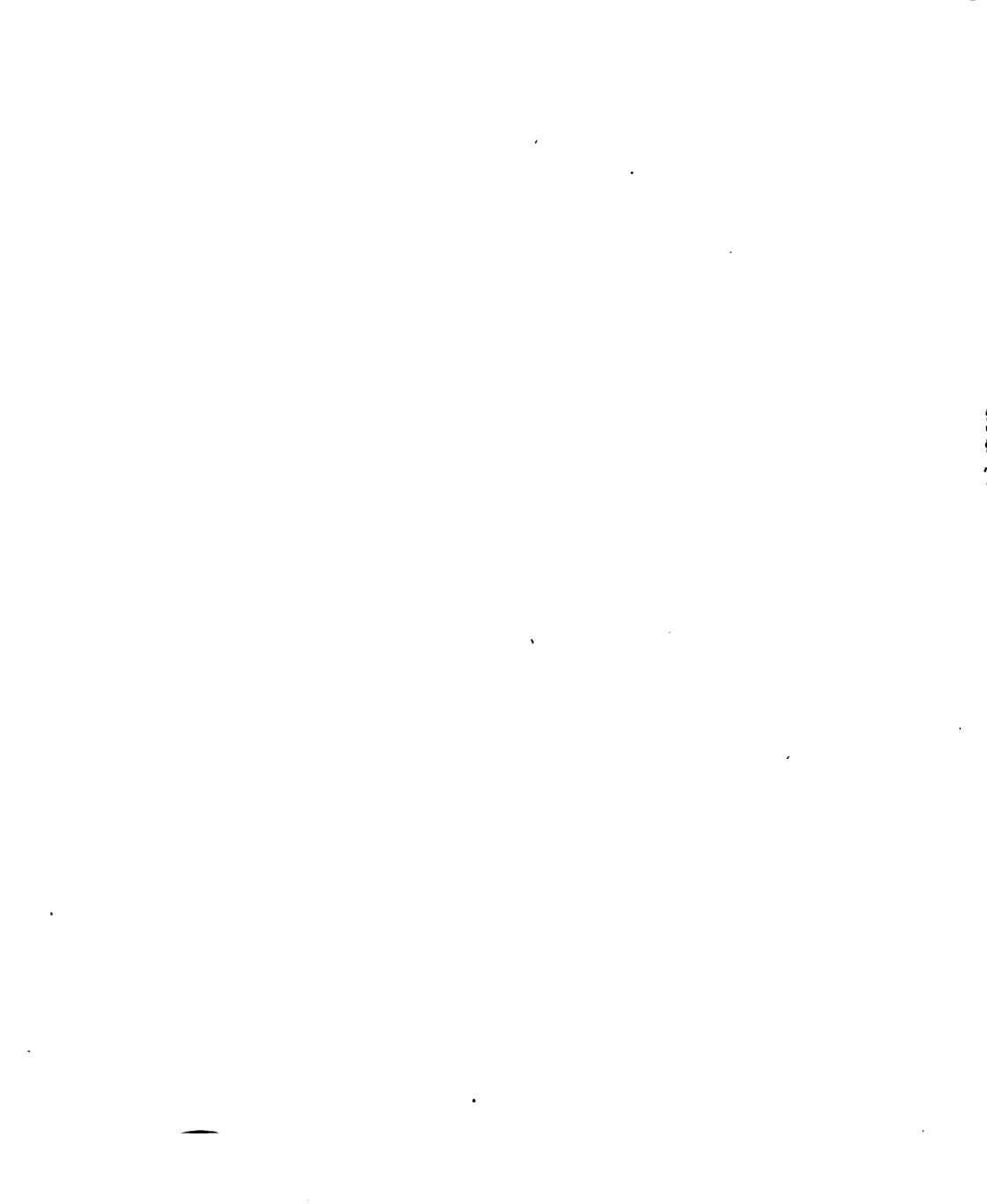


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Her brush-load shadowing her face,  
Her upright figure full of grace,  
Like those tall pines  
    whose only boughs  
Are gathered round their  
    dusky brows:—  
Singing, she waved her  
    hand, “Good-night,”  
And round the mountain  
    passed from sight.



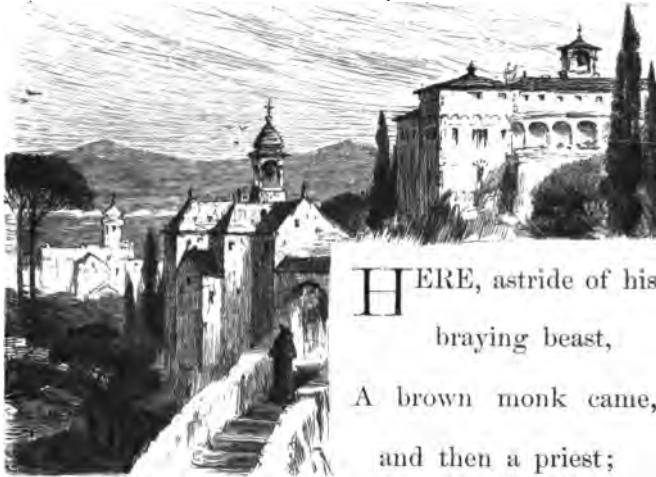


THERE climbed the laborers from their toil,  
Brown as their own Italian soil;  
Like Satyrs, some in goatskin suits,—  
Some bearing home the scanty fruits  
Of harvest work,—the swinging flasks  
Of oil or wine, or little casks,  
Under which the dull mule went  
Cheered with its bell, and the echoes sent  
From others on the higher height,  
Saying to the vale, “ Good-night,”—  
“ Good-night;”—and still the withered dame  
Slowly staggered on the same.





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HERE, astride of his  
braying beast,  
A brown monk came,  
and then a priest;

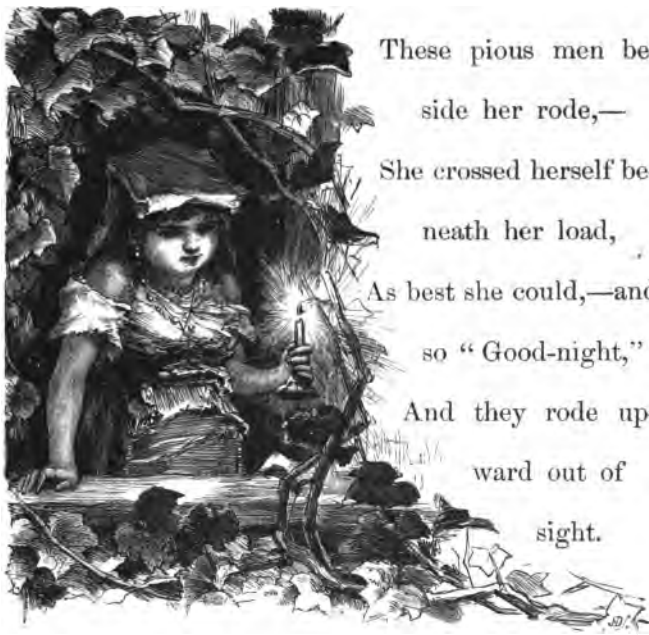
Each telling to the shadowy air,  
Perchance, his "*Ave Maria*" prayer;  
For the sky was full of vesper showers,  
Shook from the many convent towers,  
Which fell into the woman's brain  
Like dew upon an arid plain.







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These pious men be-  
side her rode,—  
She crossed herself be-  
neath her load,  
As best she could,—and  
so “Good-night,”  
And they rode up-  
ward out of  
sight.

**H**OW far, how very far it seemed,  
To where that starry taper gleamed,  
Placed by her grandchild on the sill  
Of the cottage window on the hill!





Many a parent heart before,  
Laden till it could bear no more,  
Has seen a heavenward light that smiled,  
And knew it placed there by a child;—  
A long-gone child, whose anxious face  
Gazed toward them down the deeps of space,  
Longing for the loved to come  
To the quiet of that home.



STEEPER and rougher grew the road,

Harder and heavier grew the load;

Her heart beat like a weight of stone

Against her breast. A sigh and moan

Mingled with prayer escaped her lips

Of sorrow, o'er sorrowing night's eclipse.

"Of all who pass me by," she said,

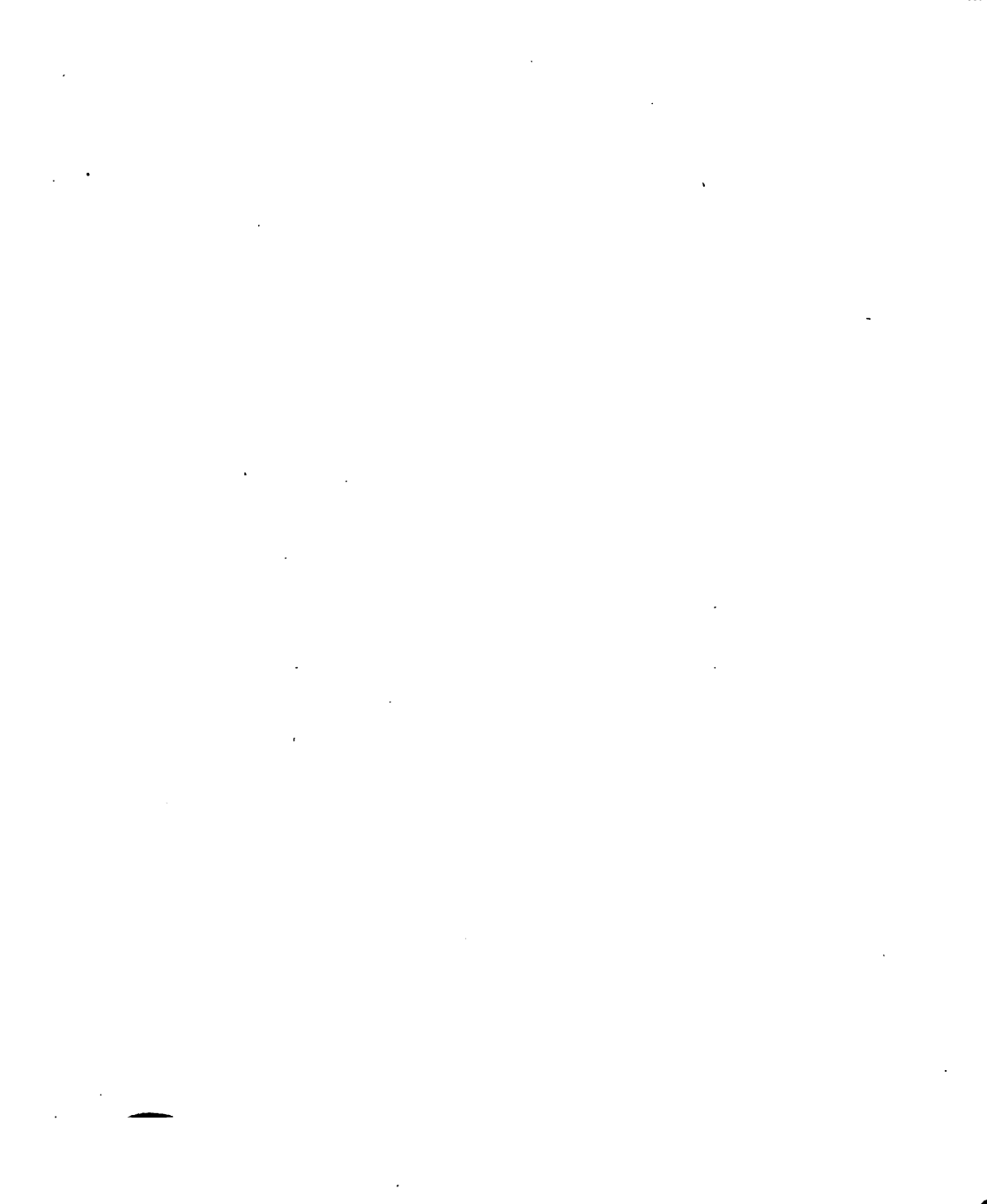
"There is never one to lend me aid;

Could I but gain yon wayside shrine,

There would I rest this load of mine,

And tell my sacred rosary through,

And try what patient prayer would do."







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AGAIN she heard the toiling tread  
Of one who climbed that way,—and said,  
“I will be bold, though I should see  
A monk or priest, or it should be  
The awful abbot, at whose nod  
The frightened people toil and plod:  
I’ll ask his aid to yonder place,  
Where I may breathe a little space,  
And so regain my home.” He came,  
And, halting by the ancient dame,  
Heard her brief story and request,  
Which moved the pity in his breast;  
And so he straightway took her load,  
Toiling beside her up the road,



Until, with heart that overflowed,  
She begged him lay her bundled sticks



Close at the feet of  
the crucifix.

SO down he set her  
brushwood freight  
Against the wayside  
cross, and straight  
She bowed her palsied  
head to greet  
And kiss the sculptured  
Saviour's feet;



And then and there she told her grief,  
In broken sentences and brief.  
And now the memory o'er her came  
Of days blown out, like a taper flame,  
Never to be relighted, when,  
From many a summer hill and glen,  
She culled the loveliest blooms to shine  
About the feet of this same shrine;  
But now, where once her flowers were gay,  
Naught but the barren brushwood lay!  
She wept a little at the thought,  
And prayers and tears a quiet brought,  
Until anon, relieved of pain,  
She rose to take her load again.







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But lo! the bundle of dead wood  
Had burst to blossom! and now stood  
Dawning upon her marvelling sight,  
Filling the air with odorous light!

**T**HEN spake her traveller-friend: "Dear Soul,  
Thy perfect faith hath made thee whole!

I am the Burthen-Bearer,—I  
Will never pass the o'erladen by.  
My feet are on the mountain steep;  
They wind through valleys dark and deep;  
They print the hot dust of the plain,  
And walk the billows of the main.  
Wherever is a load to bear,





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My willing shoulder still is there!  
Thy toil is done!" He took her hand,  
And led her through a May-time land;  
Where round her pathway seemed to wave  
Each votive flower she ever gave  
To make her favorite altar bright,  
As if the angels, at their blight,  
Had borne them to the fields of blue,  
Where, planted 'mid eternal dew,  
They bloom, as witnesses arrayed  
Of one on earth who toiled and prayed.



